DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 727 RC 013 767

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TITLE Partnerships.
PUB DATE Feb 83
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual People United for Rural Education Conference (6th, Des Moines, IA, February 3-4, 1983).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Board of Education Role; College Role; Demography; Economic Climate; *Educational Cooperation; *Educational Objectives; *Futures (of Society); Parent Participation; *Participation; Rural Environment; School Business Relationship; School Involvement; *Social Change; *Social Development; Student Participation; Tax Effort; Teacher Participation
IDENTIFIERS Industry Role; *Partnerships

ABSTRACT

The strength of partnerships within and without the educational enterprise provides the ability to alter or modify existing practices as social and economic realities emerge. A number of interdependent factors raise questions related to partnerships. Demography is a major factor; while a substantial portion of the aging population will have less immediate stake in the condition of schooling, a rebuilding of coalitions will take place as the increase in the number of adults with young children becomes more concerned with the condition and quality of schools. Tax resistance and spending reductions due to a depressed economy have served to split former partnerships that served our public schools. A sense of community seems to be having difficulty being reborn, but there are encouraging indications which portend a mending of our social fabric, not only for the survival of American society but for the future of the institutions that form the glue for that society. Many existing partnerships, particularly in rural areas, have come to the forefront in the past several years, and strengthening those ties in light of inevitable changes becomes essential. Such partnerships must involve students, parents, schools, administrators, teachers, boards of education, colleges and universities, and business and industry. (BRR)

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PARTNERSHIPS

By

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RC013767

PURE Conference
Des Moines, Iowa
February 3, 1983

Partnerships

Almost a year ago the speaker said, "Education in rural schools is alive, working to provide quality education through different organizational configurations, and experiencing many changes as it strives to meet the needs of all children for a quality education living in rural areas." In the interim the partnerships formed in the different structural and organizational configurations have continued both within and among schools and districts with renewed interest from state and Federal agencies.

One would hasten to add that the partnerships have probably neither provided a panacea in providing solutions to every concern nor one best way to address those concerns. However, the strength of partnerships within and without the educational enterprise is the ability to alter or modify existing practices as social and economic realities emerge.

Former Commissioner Nyquist of New york State made the comment several years ago that "If a state is to meet its responsibilities for the education of all children, and if local control is to be strengthened and remain meaningful, then we must develop the kinds of partnership arrangements for both planning and operations that are at once politically and popularly acceptable, financially feasible, and educationally sound." To say the prior statement is a tall order, is to understate the challenge. Nevertheless, Commissioner Nyquist's thought expands the importance of developing partnership arrangements across the array of the educational spectrum extending from the federal to local levels.

While national voices will be heard, such as the National Committee on Excellence in Education, listening to and accepting the proposals put forth will vary at first response from complete rejection to overzealousness in bringing about change. Let me cite a disclaimer, perhaps to save my own soul, but really to "tell it like it is," which speaks to the caution of addressing

the American public in more than a reasonably general way without mandates which usually deteriorate into specifics that cannot take into account the diverse and pluralistic nature of our society.

Partnerships or coalitions of pro-education backers have become "gradually unravelled due to a number of interdependent factors which can be identified although their appropriate weighting and their precise interactions are impossible to assess."[1] To name a few of the interdependent factors that raise questions related to partnerships let me mention a few: First, demography. If the baby-boom was a powerful wind at the back of the pro-school forces in the 1950s and 1960s, so the end of the baby-boom was a depressant in the 1970's."[2] We all know, too, the general aging of the population has increased substantially so that there are a number of citizens who have no immediate stakes in the condition of schooling. However, current demographic patterns or projections assure an increase in elementary and secondary enrollments by next year, 1984. The

signs are a reality. So rebuilding of coalitions will take place as the increase in the number of adults with children become more concerned with the condition and quality of schools.

Second, tax resistence and spending reductions due to a depressed economy have also served to split former partnerships that served our public schools. One can observe more and more interest today that both tax resistance and spending reductions can be carried only so far without a growing public awareness of what a substantial loss of public services with their consequent anxieties can do to stimulate a re-priortization of expenditures for necessary public functions--including the importance of education.

Third, a sense of community seems to be having difficulty being reborn from legacies of the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the militancy of teachers, the media, the growing immigration influx, but there are encouraging indications which portend a mending of our social fabric not only for the survival of American society but for the future of the institutions that

form the glue for that society. The public schools being an important one of them -- all public schools. The task is people caring, sharing, working and supporting the basic elements of community partnerships - at the local level. Rural America has generally typified that task.

It is the effort of people such as yourselves at the grass roots level which will rekindle the fires of citizenship and of quality education in the interest of the general welfare. Partnerships not confrontations are the stabilizers needed in society, and particularly in education. Time must be given to finding solutions to problems not assessing blame for them.

Given the fact that many existing partnerships, particularly in rural areas, have come to the forefront in the past several years, strengthening of those ties in light of inevitable changes become essential. Keeping communication lines open so that the rural student can have every opportunity to prepare for a service economy in an information society on a quality basis.

Let me now step into a critically important area about which

little has been either said or written, the partnership of students with the educational enterprise and those who labor within it.

Michael Timpane, Dean of Teachers College, Columbia University, commented recently: "Nowadays, we expect every student to succeed. In the past there was a meritocratic idea that learning was available for those willing to strive for it. Now we have moved beyond to saying schools have a major responsibiltiy to provide for the success of their students." One of the areas addressed by the Commission on Excellence in Education is the responsibility on the part of students in the learning process. Teachers and administrators in looking for ways to improve student achievement have turned to an industrial term, educaitonal productivity, to stress the importance of the "work ethic" or motivation as a means to engage students in their own learning process; i.e. in the classroom, one student works busily on a lesson, one "doodles" while another "socializes" - so it can be said that students themselves make the choice to beome involved -

if a tap on the shoulder, a reprimand or any effort toward behavioral management is made, a teacher can be assured of varied responses. As a parent, most of us know how each of our children differ in self-motiviation, and how each reponds differently to our demands, even within the same family.

The student partnership in the learning process is an important issue in terms of responsibility. The issue brings to mind the pervasiveness of TV and its advertising impact on youngsters. Is it the message in the program itself or is it the commercials selling goods and services that is retained? More often than not, it is the commercial with its tantalizing jingle. Productivity in the classrooms depends more on a student's willingness to work at the task of learning. Entertainment is not the role of the school.

The parent, likewise, must form a partnership with the child and with the school - when the parent is at odds with either, a very important link in the educational process is broken.

Certainly, administrators, teachers and boards of education

must form partnerships, not only among themselves but with parents, students and the community. Administrators and teachers worked as a team for many years and communicated to the outside world that school professionals were a team. Again without going into who was to blame, it is time the participants established partnerships to work together on improving the schooling process, and in joining with other groups to build the confidence and support of the general public on behalf of the public schools. One needs to bring in other partnerships within the educational community. The close working relationships with colleges and universities. Just as the agricultural extension model has formed partnershps in the agricultural enterprises, so must collegical partnerships be formed in the educational enterprise.

The help we need in strengthening curriculum, in examining structure, in doing research for which many rural areas have neither the manpower nor the funds, cries out for partnership formation.

We are witnessing also, a resurgence of interest in

elementary, secondary education by officials of business and industry. Their life and blood requires bringing capable employees and executives into the free enterprise system today. Therefore they are very dependent upon the quality or excellence of graduates, particularly in science and mathematics. Data indicates fewer students taking science and math in their junior and senior years, yet these two discipline areas form the base line of knowledge for the technological needs of their businesses and companies.

Partnerships with business and industry are an essential part of the pattern of need.

Rural educators and those who support rural education must explore ways in which their students can be exposed to the varieties of careers which are available in business and industry, as well as to learn the requirements in program as well as performance necessary for students who may choose to work in highly technical areas. The transition to work and live in this technological society is part of our consideration of excellence

in education. Usefulness is, for every student, as it was for us, the end goal of education. The goal must be to use the skills acquired and the knowledge learned to some productive and rewarding end. Yet no student need neglect nor abandon learning and the rewards of continuing to learn for its own sake.

Vocational educators have formed partnerships with business and industry through advisory councils. Job skills required are being expanded to include knowledge and skills in language, mathematics and the humanities as well as understanding the work place and what is expected of them. It would be difficult to differentiate the expectations of employers for the so-called academic student than that just given. In addition both vocational and academic educators (another artificial fragmentation in need of alliance) need to be aware of traits and attitudes in demand, adaptability, tolerance for ambiguity, the ability to work in groups, persistance in coming to closure and enthusiasm for work.

Earlier it was pointed out that rural areas, too, have

become more pluralistic, certainly more in some regions of the country than in others. Nevertheless, few rural areas are significantly isolated to the extent that citizenship obligations of access and equity are not recognizable issues. Relationships are needed to address the issues of access and equity in what has been called "America's Unfinished Agenda" -- Nearly everyone has a "window on the world" through the miracle of satellite and micro-wave communication. From the view we are becoming more and more aware of the necessity of understanding different cultures since our partnerships extend beyond our nation's borders. Isolation and complete self-sufficiency are illusory, and more unrealistic. Consequently, the perhaps unclear and sketchy message in this address is that partnerships must be forged in education among and between people in rural areas, urban and suburban areas, states, the nation and yes, internationally. The consequences of such partnershps are to provide quality education for students who will become the leaders of tomorrow, and who in turn make their communities, state, nation and the world a better

place to live.

We will maintain the view that education is an indispensible asset for a free people -- all of them -- the best assurance against both tyranny and mobocracy.

That's the way it is, February 3, 1983.

Footnotes

[1] Stephen K. Bailey, A Second Transformation of the Schools, Essay, 1981.

[2] Ibid.